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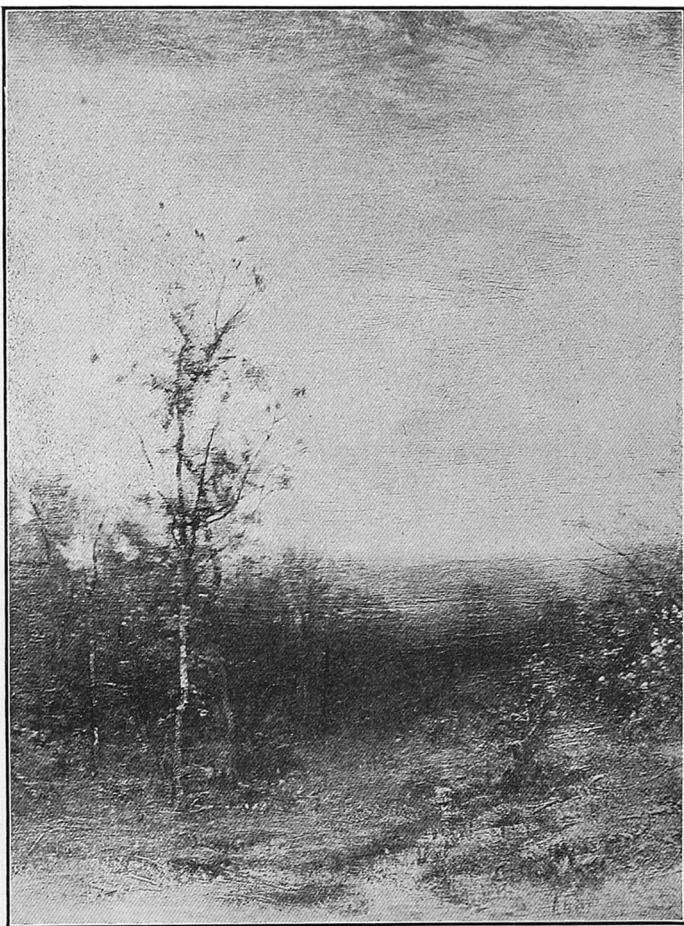
THE TRUE FUNCTION OF MUNICIPAL ART LEAGUES

Many of our artists have from time to time publicly and enthusiastically expressed their appreciation of what has been done and is being done by local clubs to advance the art movement in our cities; so I am sure the feeling of the artist-body must be thoroughly understood and known to every one who is at all interested in the work. It is, therefore, unnecessary to say anything further about it at this time. A sentiment, however, which I have heard expressed more than once recently, leads me to think that some who are connected more or less closely with it do not at all realize either its scope or its objects. I have heard three different members of clubs within the last fortnight refer to the movement as one "to help the artists."

Now, of course philanthropy, properly directed, is a most admirable thing; it is also true that a painter or a sculptor may sometimes be in straits and need and deserve assistance, as frequently happens in other walks of life; but on behalf not only of my fellow-artists, but also of the large body of men and women interested with them in the work, I wish to emphasize as strongly as may be that the work engaged in by the art committees of the Municipal Art Leagues and the clubs associated with them is not in any sense philanthropic.

The artists as a body do not relish the idea of being regarded as objects of charity, even by what I am sure is a very small minority. If the aim of such a widespread movement is merely to prevent a couple of hundred misguided men and women from starving to death or becoming public charges, we would much better turn our efforts into some other channels, for the danger is not at all immediate nor alarming. If portraits are not to be painted, statues not to be erected, churches and libraries not to be decorated, if pictures are not wanted in our homes, at least illustrations are needed and paid for, and pupils are always to be had. And even if those sources of income should not suffice, the artists might (at least partially) supply the demand for *art lectures!*

But seriously, if art *is* a good thing; if architectural design in our dwellings and our public buildings has a real value above bare constructive necessity; if artistically wrought furniture, beautiful pictures, and harmonious coloring contribute to the attractiveness and elevation of our homes, and stimulate the higher intellectual faculties; if noble statuary and monumental decorations dignify public edifices; if a nation's art *is* a nation's glory; then indeed we have good and sufficient reason for combining our efforts to further the progress of art and the understanding and love of art in our cities.



GOLDEN HOUR
By A. H. Wyant
Collection of Frederick S. Gibbs



That the average great city in America in its wonderful strides toward material prosperity has attained a one-sided development, is to a certain extent lacking in elements essential to the character of a metropolis, must be admitted by even the most loyal citizen. It is doubtless a recognition of this fact that induces some of the public-spirited citizens of Chicago to make up the annual deficit of the Chicago Orchestra. For twelve years they have by subscriptions amounting to several thousands of dollars maintained this organization, until now it is worthy to be ranked with the finest orchestras in the world. Not, I take it, because they were especially desirous of helping the musicians, nor because they were particularly solicitous that Mr. Thomas should be able to pay his board bills, but because music is a good thing to have; because the educational results of such concerts are of great value to the community and its people; because it elevates standards and gives joy to thousands; and finally, because it adds immensely to the fame and prestige of the city.

True, the impetus given by increased musical understanding, awakened interest, and love for music has multiplied opportunities for its artists, and has drawn them hither and kept them when otherwise they might have been driven away by necessity, as so many painters and sculptors have been during the last twenty years. In that way it has "helped the artists," and the work the many clubs are interested in now will help them in the same way. But it is merely an incidental good, and not at all the main object we are striving for.

If space permitted it would not be difficult to prove that there is no investment which a city can possibly make that will pay larger intellectual, moral, yes, and *financial*, dividends than the investment in good art, and the elevation of public taste and standards. If we can make a city beautiful instead of ugly, clean instead of filthy, attractive instead of repulsive, interesting intellectually as well as financially, how many thousands who now avoid it will be drawn thither; how many hundreds who now leave it as soon as their fortunes are made will remain, because then it would be a place to live in as well as to do business in?

Yes, "to make us love our city we must make our city lovely." To do this is not so impossible a thing as might seem; but first it will be necessary to create a love for the beautiful, an understanding of the value and necessity of art—the public sentiment without which all reform and progress is impossible.

If the commercial prosperity of a country or a city is its foundation and strength, so also is its æsthetic thought and achievement its crown and glory. The latter may be impossible without the former, but the former is bare, cold, and unlovely without the latter. Our aim should be and is to foster and encourage the best forms of artistic expression of which we as a community or as individuals are capable; to discover and help develop artistic talent; to add to the beauty of

our environment, the æsthetic wealth of our possessions, the joy of living. This is certainly a worthy and commendable purpose.

It has often been said, and with a foundation of truth, that in our country whenever a positive need is felt, a certain thing demanded, that thing is quickly forthcoming. And it will be so in matters of art. When the necessity arises, when the actual demand comes—as it will come—men and women capable of meeting the very highest demands will be found. The development must, of course, be gradual. It is not a condition which can be produced in a moment, nor in a day, nor in a year; but a normal, healthy growth can be insured by the methods now being used in our municipalities. The progress made by the artists will to a great extent be determined by the growth of taste and appreciation among the people themselves. The time, attention, and serious thought given by a committee to the selection of even one picture from an exhibition will, I venture to say, be of more practical value to the novice in the way of art education than a whole course of the average art lectures.

You may read learned books on the theory and practice of art till your eyes ache; you may listen to learned disquisitions on the practice of painting, music, sculpture, until your head swims—and it will help you very little to know good art from bad unless at the same time your mind comes into intimate contact with the actual thing. Your eyes must see, your ears must hear, your brain must study and compare and comprehend for itself.

Art is not something which can be acquired by being taken in doses like medicine at stated intervals, but like religion it must be a part of the daily life—lived to be understood or valued. We have made a good beginning in America, but the greater part of the road lies before us. We can already take the stranger to many an institution and show him collections of treasures gathered from the ends of the earth. We could take him to many private homes and show other similar treasures. So far, so good. But when he asks to be shown the rare and beautiful things we have made ourselves, we are too often obliged to substitute bigness for beauty, and guide him to our factories and office buildings. The bond, then, which holds us together in this campaign of education, enlightenment, and progress, for artist and layman alike, must be *Pro bono publico*.

OLIVER DENNETT GROVER.